

Mayer Brown Helps Disabled Child Find Loving Home

By Lisa Ryan



Law360, New York (December 05, 2014, 2:25 PM ET) -- A severely disabled 11-year-old boy was finally adopted by the loving foster family who fought for more than four years to give him a home after a pair of dedicated Mayer Brown LLP attorneys donated their time to help the family navigate the difficult legal terrain of adopting a special-needs child.

On Nov. 22, which was formally recognized as National Adoption Day, Earl and Barbara Taylor formally welcomed their foster child John'Ta Pimentel into their family in a ceremony at the D.C. Superior Courthouse, the culmination of a four-year legal battle. Mayer Brown attorneys Laura A. Reilly and Kara N. Hoffman worked pro bono on behalf of the Taylors, helping them jump through the hoops necessary to prove they had the capabilities of caring for John'Ta's health needs.

"Every child deserves to have a home," Reilly said. "Providing a permanent home for a child is just about as rewarding an experience as you can get as an attorney."

The Taylor family first learned of John'Ta while watching an episode of NBC's "Wednesday's Child," a television program aimed to match disadvantaged children to potential foster parents, according to the attorneys. The family had recently lost a son, and their surviving children encouraged their parents to adopt John'Ta because he reminded them of their late brother.

The family decided to offer John'Ta a spot in their home but was faced with legal roadblocks because of the severity of his disabilities, which included cerebral palsy, mental retardation and partial blindness, the attorneys said. John'Ta had been living in a hospital full time since his birth parents were unable to accommodate his special needs.

Reilly and Hoffman came across the Taylors' case while pursuing postings on the The Children's Law Center website. The attorneys had previously worked together on pro bono cases through the center and were attracted not only to the complexity of the case but also the emotional aspect of the adoption.

"I think the case really appealed to us because the situation was just so sad — that in the year 2013, an American child could be raised in a hospital because his biological parents could not take care of him," Reilly said.

The attorneys reached out to The Children's Law Center and began representing the Taylors in October

2013. The family had been in the pursuit of adopting John'Ta for years at that point, and after undergoing arduous medical training, background checks and a certification process, they were able to get the hospital to release John'Ta to their custody and were serving as his foster parents, the lawyers said.

The most difficult aspect of the case was coordinating among all the different parties in the suit as there were a number of different stakeholders representing his interests.

The attorneys had to work with several different teams representing John'Ta, from the government to his biological parents. While everyone wanted John'Ta to have a permanent home, they were concerned about whether his foster family would be able to handle all of his medical needs, Hoffman said.

"The biggest challenge for our clients is that they live in a rural part of Maryland and are further removed from medical facilities that a metropolitan area provides for a child like John'Ta," Hoffman said. "His hospitalization and continued medical care presented its own set of challenges."

In total, the attorneys dedicated 286 hours to helping the Taylors through the adoption process. Reilly usually serves as a commercial real estate attorney at the firm, while Hoffman is a commercial litigator, so the duo applied their legal expertise and negotiation know-how to make the process as seamless as possible.

"I don't think we could be happier with the outcome. Our clients are ecstatic; they've always felt John'Ta was their son, and now they've formally completed the paperwork," Hoffman said. "The Adoption Day ceremony [was] really just a formality and a celebration of all their hard work and perseverance over the past four years."

Pro Bono Spotlight is a recurring Law360 series profiling law firm pro bono efforts.

--Editing by Katherine Rautenberg and Christine Chun.